News of the World

15 MINUTES TO DOOMSDAY

SECRET REVEALED OF KENNEDY'S 'LOCKED BOX'

By Jack Miller

FOR 15 fateful minutes on the day Jack Kennedy died, America stood wide open and helpless to any nuclear bomb raid that might have come; the greatest military machine in the world would have been spiked.

That would have happened while Soviet bombers crossed the coast of Canada, and might even have continued afterwards in the second-strike stage of an attack.

America was in this plight because Jack Kennedy kept the secrets of America's reply to surprise attack locked in a mysterious black box which went everywhere with him—carried by an agent code-named "Shadow."

And Lyndon Johnson, Vice-President when that fateful day dawned, President by the time it was over, did not know the secrets of the box.

So says William Manchester in his long awaited book, *The Death of a President*, which is published in Britain tomorrow (Michael Joseph 60s.).

The box was a metal suitcase weighing 30lb, fitted with an intricate combination lock and holding what Manchester calls "Strangelove packets," sealed and signed by Kennedy's military chiefs.

Strangelove, you remember, was the mad scientist in the film *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

The codes

In one of these packets were cryptic numbers with which Kennedy could set up a crude "hot line" to Britain's Prime Minister—then Sir Alec Douglas-Home—and President de Gaulle within four minutes.

In another packet were the codes to be used to launch a nuclear reply.

The rest looked like horror comics; they had been carefully designed so that any of Kennedy's three military aides could tell him quickly how many millions would be killed and wounded by each stage of America's three-stage counter-attack.

Now while Kennedy died in Dallas, Lyndon Johnson was guarded by Secret Servicemen in one part of the hospital while "Shadow," who was unknown to the Vice-President's party says Manchester, was kept secluded in another.

And far away in Washington General Maxwell Taylor chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff seethed, because: 'Johnson had no idea what was in the bag. He knew it existed, but he hadn't been briefed about the contents, and if the thunderbolt of all-out war struck that afternoon the country's retaliatory arsenal could be spiked until he had been led through (it) for the first time."

Yet, says Manchester, two years earlier, just after Johnson was appointed Vice-President, Captain "Tazz" Shepard sent the bag to his office and it had been returned with the explanation that "Johnson did not want it."

But there was no attack so, in Manchester's words, "the price of folly was unpaid."

Another thing Manchester believes is that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone killer of Kennedy and there was no plot, but down in New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison will soon set out to prove just the opposite.

My information is that he will say there were, in fact, two plots which overlapped. This is backed by yet another Kennedy book due to be published soon, *Oswald the Truth*, by Joachim Joesten, a German - American investigator.

This one is so hot U.S. publishers refuse to touch it and after setting all the type a British printer dropped it. So the printing plates have had to be flown to Holland. But the Kennedy mystery, like Jack the Ripper's, will be with us a long time yet.